Construction-Log d'Or Farm 11/23/72 Harold Heidberg

The book value of our buildings, which represents the cash we remember putting into them, bears little relationship to their cost under normal conditions or what they would have cost the average person if he had hired even country contractors to build them. There came a time when I took this up with agricultural economists at the University of Maryland, first Bill Laughton and then his successor, Mike Haness. I think Jake computed their value as of the time of computation at $37,000.

Expensive components cost me absolutely nothing, next to nothing, or very little. I did all or most of the work myself, depending upon the building and the time. Where I hired labor, its cost was slight even by standards of that day and even though I paid the hourly price asked.

Much of the concrete cost me nothing. I did favors for the contractor engaged in road construction, such as storing some of his things of value. In return for this, he sent me the left-over concrete. This often meant I had to finish it alone and sometimes after dark, but that was a non-cash price and I did it. They had to order more concrete than required for a pour on a bridge, for example, to be sure they had enough. Soon the truck drivers learned that I could use concrete, and when they had it left over from other jobs, instead of wasting it on the ground, as is normal, they'd drive to my place and swap it for dressed chickens, ready to cook. The one prerequisite was that the truck not leave the highway. As soon as I learned this I made a long wooden chute, which I placed under the end of the truck's chutes, and I always had bracing near for it and forms ready for the concrete where forming was required, as in footings. The entire first floor of my henhouse, save for a tiny corner, cost me not a cent in cash.

Soon after we bought the property and while I was clearing it, a man whose name I remember as Max Wagenberg, stopped to try to buy some walnut trees from me. He gave me his card. He ran a veneer mill near Woodsboro, which is near Frederick. I didn't sell him the trees, but I went to his mill and bought the unusable hearts of veneer logs for $5.00 a truck load, on my own truck, so there was no cash trucking charge. These were boards of varying thickness and width and length, but of a quality otherwise not obtainable in any lumber yard. Only knotless logs of top quality are considered for veneering. I got their hearts, or the best. The extra work in using them consisted in ~~straightening~~ sawing the long edges parallel. For sheathing their width was immaterial.

Almost all the framing in the 40-foot broiler house came from logs I cut from our property in clearing it. What I couldn't use for lumber I used for heating. I had so much of this I began by selling it as firewood. Except with unusually long and heavy logs, I hauled them about 10 miles to a sawmill run by a part-time school-bus driver named Cliff Watkins, near Kemptown. Cliff charged me only 1½¢ a board foot for sawing the logs into lumber. In most cases I was able to arrange a one-way haul, that is, bring back the lumber when I took the next batch of logs. My cash cost here was for the gas and the sawyer's charge only. With the longs I couldn't handle - and I handled some more than 20 feet long - a local trucker hauled them in spare time at slight cost, some of which I paid back by doing slight hauling for him.

When the right-of-way for US 240, later I-70, was being cleared, I bought an enormous quantity of logs for $20.00. I then had an irascible and opinioned transplanted "cracker" neighbor, Frank Calloway. Frank was incensed at the deal the State made with him for his land. Where it adjoined mine it was densely grown with very large trees, mostly poplar and sycamore. Three foot diameters were not uncommon. I had taken down an ash on my land near his where the butt cut was four feet. Such poplars and sycamores grow tall and straight. Their yield in board feet is enormous. I was at the next farm to the west one day when Frank was cursing the state. He concluded, "and the first damned son-of-a-bitch who offers me $20 can have all the goddamned logs". I took the money out of my pocket and handed it to him. However, they were too much for me to handle. Before the local trucker could take them to the sawmill, heavy equipment was moved in. Where this happened after dark, the truckers stole the best of the poplar logs, which though were worth 2¢ a board foot on the stump for all veneer cuts. Even with this thievery, about which I could do nothing, there remained enough for most of the lumber requirements of the part of the henhouse I was then building and enough firewood to heat us for several winters. I didn't install an oil furnace until I had consumed all the available firewood. The only problem caused by the firewood heat

came when the wood was dry. It would not burn the night through. I'd have to get up once and put a new chunk in the old but like-new Kentrola stove I had. I sold it for about what I'd paid for it.

I also bought trees on the stump on an adjacent property that was off the road and unused, had a friend cut these down with a chain saw, and had them sawn locally. The board-foot cost was very little in cash.

When I had exhausted all such possibilities, I found a man who shipped logs to his family veneer millin South Carolina, where they supplied furniture factories. I got from him, delivered, the left-overs, sawn into board for about 5¢ a board foot. They were actually stronger than lumber-yard lumber, were a full inch in thickness for 1" boards whereas dressed lumber is but 3/4", and that there were rough boards made no difference to the chickens. Nor did it when they were covered, as they later were when I insulated the buildings. This special deal also included framing, to 2" in thickness and 10' in length. The buildings were this strong: Hurricane Hazel passed over them without destruction. The only damage was the spreading of some of the framing of the second storey of the second part of the henhouse. I never did figure out how that happened without the whole thing tumbling down, but it did, without taking the bracing out. It did pull the nails some. It made no difference in the finished henhouse, where this small part of 2½' wasn't visible. When the pulling of the nails in the bracing of the inco plate framing showed on examination after the storm, I remailed the studs and plates, added a bit of bracing between them, and there was no real cost except in my time.

Even when I insulated the buildings this was true. For the finished surface I used masonite I hauled myself in 32 square-foot sheets 1/8" thick. They cost me about $1.80 each, much less than lumber. I also used cement-asbestos board, which was about 5-1/2¢ a square foot delivered.

The initial wiring was old-fashioned knob-and-tube, with which I was familiar from boyhood. I got this kind of wire at the junk yard at its slight salvage value. That it was in pieces made no difference because I had to cut between the numerous sockets anyway. They cost only about 10¢ each, less when I got them wholesale, which I sometimes did. When I later rewired, as I did with all the buildings, I was able to get the cable wholesale and did except where it was cheaper on a loss-leader sale. Ditto on the home, which I also wired, up until after the suit, when we thought the victory would end the overflights and we hired an electrician so we could proceed with the completion of the upper floors of the house. I was then too occupied with the flocks and marketing.

I also did almost all the plumbing myself, usually with soft copper tubing I got wholesale and pressure rather than soldered joints. The hard tubing represented no asset in chicken houses and there was a big asset in not having to pay a plumber and getting the materials wholesale, sometimes free or on junk. (An astounding amount of started units, brand new, are sold to junk yards after being charged to a construction job.)

The framing of pole buildings is creosoted poles. I used replaced phone and electric poles that I often got by saving the utilities the time of hauling them away. I discarded the in-the-ground part, burning it for heat, and used the like-new if not better-than-new (because seasoned) in-the-air parts. Had to cut them to size anyway. I hauled them on my own truck, cutting them to approximate size where they were discarded. As a volunteer fireman I also knew where there were accidents requiring the replacement of poles. When I had to pay for such poles, the cost was never over $5.00 each, and those were long enough to make three cuts in some cases. Never less than two. However I got them, these were much thicker than what was sold for this purpose, ever so much stronger. The only other framing required in the vertical walls was a top and a bottom plate and a middle nailing piece.

Nails and things like them were easily available wholesale and often free or close to it when bought at farm auctions, as was also true of some other materials. Often there were quantities of them in boxes of miscellaneous junk. (Pretty much true of bolts.) Once I bought more than a keg of 6d and 16d nails for about $2. For about that also I got almost a keg of 6d galvanized nails I think I still have. I know I still have quantities of finishing nails bought for little in the same manner.

If this doesn't tell all the economies possible in building in those days and doesn't begin to tell the labor, I hope it gives an idea.